

Don Brown
Fleurs

8 Bury Street SW1Y
16 March – 22 April 2023

Painting is a meditative activity, these paintings are slow to make – all the thoughts of the day and thoughts about other paintings and all the things that I have ever seen and remember pass through my mind when I'm making them and I hope are reflected somehow in there, implied not declared. Flowers are the ideal subject for such an activity fleeting as they are, decorative and profound, silent and expressive: things in paintings exist as though suspended in an aspic-like medium – we are looking into a world that is familiar but we can't touch these objects – like dreams they float tantalisingly more real than real but it is an illusion, an imaginary space.

– Don Brown, March 2023



Don Brown paints flowers using only black and white oil pigment. The results are images of great elegance, which direct our attention to the structure of the flowers, their relative neatness or decadence, primness or unselfconsciousness, complexity or simplicity of form. Looking closer we can detect the subtle differences in texture and translucency between leaves, petals, and the treasuries of pollen at the centre: the character of the plant emerges, without the obvious cue of colour. This character is deliberately mysterious and puzzling, provocative even. Carefully deployed highlights and a shallow depth of field mean that peripheral parts seem to disappear into the hazy backgrounds, as if into wells of darkness.

Reducing images to tonal contrast is not the same as painting in black and white, as you would find, for example in a printed image, like a woodcut. Nor is this monochrome (single colour) painting, but rather as if colour has been introduced as the smallest element, the tiniest homeopathic drop of hue to stimulate our senses. It is in part imaginary: we are so used to seeing the rich colours of flowers that we imagine the petals of the Peony to be pink, or the stems of the flowers to be green. It is also the physical result of using pigment that can be applied thinly, using oil medium, to create different levels of light refraction, creating chromatic tints that are somehow, imperceptibly there.

Where are these flowers? They seem detached from the world, transported to the realm of painting and all its attendant problems. We might be looking at a vase of flowers reflected in the black lacquered lid of a grand piano, or in a Claude Glass, those black mirrors used by landscape artists to simplify and give unity to the scenes they painted. Seeing 'through a glass darkly', creates an elegant distance, not as if the flowers were embalmed or preserved, but rather as if given a lunar quality: objects floating in a different atmosphere of light, each with its own special personality and presence.

– John-Paul Stonard, February 2023

Don Brown (b. 1962, Norfolk) studied at the Central School of Art (1983-5) and the Royal College of Art (1985-8). He has exhibited in galleries and museums internationally, including recent solo presentations *Fleurs*, Rochelle Canteen, London (2020), *Fleurs* at Sadie Coles HQ, London, and *Seven Paintings*, the inaugural online exhibition in the HOMEWORK series presented by Sadie Coles HQ (both 2020). Group exhibitions include *POP GOES THE PASTORAL*, The Old Theatre, Framlingham, England (2021); Newlands House Gallery, Petworth, England (2021); *Drawn Together Again*, Flag Art Foundation, New York (2019); *Selected works from the Murderme Collection*, Newport Street Gallery, London (2017); *Theatrical Gestures*, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel (2013); *Presence: the art of the sculpted portrait*, Holburne Museum, Bath (2012); *Freedom Not Genius*, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin (2012); and *The Naked Portrait*, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2007). In 2007, *Yoko* a solo exhibition of work by Don Brown was presented at Le Consortium, Dijon (2007). His work is in public collections including that of Tate.

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